

ABM

# Russia Cautious on U.S. ABM Move

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Published Russian reaction to the Administration's ABM decision has been scant and tentative and, so far, has borne out American hopes that a "thin" missile defense against China will not spur Moscow to build its own "thick" defense against the United States.

But officials caution that, in the month since the United States announced that it would deploy an anti-China missile shield, the Kremlin probably has not sorted out all the complex strategic, political and economic reasons for and against a full-scale ABM defense. The officials doubt, but are looking hard to see whether the new Soviet defense budget, up 15 per cent, reflects an ABM move.

The U.S. announcement was on Sept. 18; the first Soviet reaction on Sept. 24, in Pravda. The headline, "A New Push for the Arms Race?," both posed the issue and expressed the Kremlin's indecision on it, officials suggested.

As though tipping Moscow's hand, Pravda said that "people in the U.S. are debating" whether to construct a \$40-\$50 billion "global" ABM system. It quoted approvingly an American newspaper's fears that "insurmountable political pressure" might lead Washington to "useless escalation of expenditures in money and resources for armament."

Moscow's only other comment came Oct. 4 in Izvestia: "Who Is Interested in This?" Izvestia said "United Nations circles are apprehensive" lest the U.S. ABM

decision hurt disarmament prospects, but it found "no unanimous opinion" and pointed out that "a number of our U.N. discussion partners" said there would be no such damage.

Scanning these press statements, American officials see no firm line. Nor, they note, has Moscow yet answered the earlier American invitation to talk about forestalling mutual ABM deployment.

"As long as we were just

suggesting talks, the Russians could relax. Their internal differences precluded action," said one official. "Now our anti-China deployment puts pressure on them and this may force the issue."

One nongovernmental expert explained Moscow's low-key noncommittal reaction this way: "First, our decision followed theirs (the initial Soviet ABM deployment which Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara reported and poohpoohed

last December). So what can they do?"

"Secondly, our action is tolerable. It doesn't threaten them. It doesn't change the strategic relationship."

Two of Moscow's East European allies, Poland and Czechoslovakia, have said a lot more. Washington finds their responses intriguing but suspects the ax they grind is East Europe's own, not the Soviet Union's.

Warsaw's Slowo Powsteczne, engaging in a rare critical pairing of Moscow

and Washington, wrote that after the war "both superpowers overstepped their capacities for mutual destruction."

It said building ABM "systems" could upset the "shaky but rather enduring armed balance" now holding between East and West and, "what is worse," could "restore nuclear weapons to their tragic operativeness, because an aggressor will assume that he is no longer exposed to destruction by retaliation."